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ABSTRACT

Public education has both political, or social, and personal, or self-improvement objectives; in addition it provides much of the moral quality of a democratic society. Each function--personal, political, and moral--has special significance for continuing education. Adults continue their education to update their job skills or to seek satisfaction in the use of leisure time. Yet the less obvious relationship between continuing education and the political and moral characteristics illuminates some of its distinctive aspects. Its position outside the central concerns of most schools has been both cause and effect of its special quality and contributions. Its spirit of immediacy, directness, and relevance inspires a mode of examination and questioning most essential in our mass society. The Continuing Education Center for the Public Service at Syracuse University has been called the "social conscience" of the University. The Center approach--concern for real social problems, involvement of clientele and faculty, use of participatory training methods, flexibility in time and place, and relevance--these factors characterize program development at the Center for businessmen, government officials, social planners, poor people, minorities, or any identifiable group of adults. (Author)

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CONTINUING EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Public education has both political, or social, and personal, or self-improvement objectives; in addition it provides much of the moral quality of a democratic society. Each function--personal, political, and moral-- has special significance for continuing education. Adults continue their education to update their job skills or to seek satisfaction in the use of leisure time. Yet the less obvious relationship between continuing education and the political and moral characteristics illuminates some of its distinctive aspects. Its position outside the central concerns of most schools has been both cause and effect of its special quality and contributions. Its spirit of immediacy, directness, and relevance inspires a mode of examination and questioning most essential in our mass society. The Continuing Education Center for the Public Service at Syracuse University has been called the "social conscience" of the University. The Center approach--concern for real social problems, involvement of clientele and faculty, use of participatory training methods, flexibility in time and place, and relevance--these factors characterize program development at the Center for businessmen, government officials, social planners, poor people, minorities, or any identifiable group of adults.

CONTINUING EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Education in American society throughout our national history has been conceived as serving a number of functions, sometimes quite contradictory. Public education was and is supposed to make workable our governmental system. In a democratic society, popular education is necessary if people are to have the knowledge and sense to make wise political decisions. The same educational process has borne the obligation of preparing people to earn their livelihood, to produce the goods of the society. Thus, public education has had and still is considered to have both political, social, and personal, self-improvement objectives.

There is another fundamental characteristic of education in a democratic society. It has a profound moral basis, and, in turn, provides much of the moral quality of that society. Education is fundamentally concerned with the cultivation of man's reason and a sense of responsibility in the use of reason. It is the latter conviction and commitment which constitutes the moral characteristic of education. Ideally, the educational process would produce adults who were vitally concerned about others, about humanity in general, about social or public problems, about improving the lot of human-kind. The fact that it doesn't is no denial of the idea or ideal. To deny the moral quality or objective would imply a view of man as something less than human, with all of his doubts and longing and searching.

For those who work in that level of the system known as continuing education, each of these functions--personal, political, and moral--has special significance. Considering the nature of the clientele--adults--the first seems fairly obvious. Adults continue their education beyond the years of formal schooling to upgrade or update job skills, to prepare for new or expanded job responsibilities; or to seek some sense of satisfaction in the use of more leisure time, or during longer, earlier retirement years.

The bulk of continuing education best known to the public at large falls in this category. Vocational education, mid-career training, executive development, skills training are all designs for some form of self-improvement. In a related sense, music appreciation, study of American novels, weaving, etc. are also aimed at personal needs and fulfillment.

The special relationship of continuing education to the other two characteristics--political and moral, which for the purposes of this discussion can be considered together--is not so obvious. Yet the connection, historical and in terms of structure, illuminates some of the most significant and distinctive aspects of continuing education.

Throughout its history as a formal part of the educational system, continuing education has seemed to be particularly concerned with and responsive to public issues, social conditions and problems, the general state of mankind. In a perverse kind of way, the traditional status of continuing education as a peripheral, academically not-quite-respectable form has helped to develop this characteristic.

It can be argued that the marginal reputation of continuing education--its position outside the central or major concerns of most schools--has been both cause and effect of the special quality and contributions of the field. For many in the educational profession, part of the low esteem accorded continuing education has stemmed from this distinctness--the variety of methods, unending range of content and objectives, flexibility in format, time and place, the informality and lack of fixed structure and routine. To ~~many~~^{many}, the resultant educational activities have seemed to be something less than academically respectable.

On the other hand, because continuing education has been considered something different and relatively unimportant in many schools, there has

been to support it, even the educational institutions with their own resources, are faced with additional problems, different kinds of content, different audiences and objectives. Probably the better continuing educators have often recoiled in the separateness of their brand of education, even if regarded as a lesser quality by their colleagues in the academic departments. For many of them see this situation as an impetus, a structural inspiration toward creating the kind of continuing education which is exciting and pioneering, the "cutting edge" of educational innovation.

It is this condition, this situation which gives continuing education the potential for important contributions in the search for meaning in a mass society. There are, of course, other factors which provide the framework within which continuing educators meet this challenge. They tend to encourage the effective application of continuing education to the problems of man living in a mass society. The comparative affluence of more and more adults makes their attention to life-long learning possible and encourages interests not related to vocation or profession. More and more doctors, dentists, engineers, lawyers, teachers, and businessmen are studying art, literature, history, and social problems. In spite of all the competing appeals for the use of leisure time, more adults are continuing their education, frequently in areas which help to emphasize individualism and reduce the sense of mass-ness.

The impact of mass media, especially television, cannot be exaggerated as it relates to continuing education. It inspires program concepts and approaches, dramatizes and imparts immediacy and relevance to social issues and the condition of man; it pricks the conscience of the citizen and whets the appetite for new knowledge and experience.

The revolutionary proliferation of information, aided and abetted so much by television, encourages countless adults to continue their education; in fact, it has done much to introduce professionals to the practice of continuing

education, if only to keep up to date in one's field. The individual who has also been educated for a general education, who is not so confused and disoriented by the constant onslaught of information and other stimuli from mass media, there is a yearning for fundamentals, for educational experiences which relate to values and to continuing qualities of human life.

One of the seemingly illogical consequences of the 'knowledge explosion' is the sense of isolation and alienation felt by many thoughtful adults. These people frequently turn to some form of continuing education in search of meaning, relevance, a sense of unity, a sense of identity and value.

Lacking the constraints, ritual, and regimen of more traditional levels and forms of education, continuing education can be and sometimes is the seed bed of democratic idealism, the bridge between individual self-interest and social involvement. Continuing educators, especially in urban universities, react directly to social stimuli. With one foot in the community and freed from traditional academic restrictions, the continuing educator tries to respond to the challenge of white racism, the alienation of youth, the rise in street crimes, the plight of the hard-core unemployed, the fears of the white working class, the irrational mess of our cities, and the constant search for identity and a sense of value.

The most exciting educational experiences in America are those in which busy adults are lifted out of the humdrum of daily preoccupations and routines and introduced to new ideas, challenges and perspectives. They attend seminars to study various facets of their own communities or national or world problems; they learn about ways in which they can exert greater influence on the conduct of public affairs; they view and discuss films or television productions related

to social issues and conditions; they anticipate that the continuing education of public officials, administrators and the public itself; they attend countless conferences exploring every variety of public issue, community problem, world situation.

Adults who exercise some special public responsibility also turn to continuing education for fresh insights, new approaches, broader perspectives. Law enforcement officers spend a week or two in seminars striving to understand themselves, their work and their relationships to others, as well as the most modern and efficient techniques of crime control. Administrators in many federal, state, and local agencies or departments are enrolled in special courses, frequently lasting a month or more, designed to broaden perspectives beyond the specialty, demonstrate inter-relationships, examine new ways of approaching problems, and keep informed on changing concepts or methods in their field. Mayors and department heads in local governments are more and more involved in conferences and institutes to discuss inter-governmental relations, new dimensions and significance of local problems, and new techniques for solving problems.

The nature of the profession is congenial with the needs of the time. Men and women who serve as continuing educators are more concerned about the here and now, about the practical, the realistic, the impact on behavior. There is a sense of urgency about continuing education seldom noticed in the ranks of other levels of education. The proceedings of annual conventions of continuing educators during the past fifty years provide impressive evidence of this concern for making education effective--a practical instrument for the improvement of human life and the social order.

This spirit of immediacy, directness, and relevance inspires a mode of examination and questioning most essential in a mass society. The basic issues of the day as well as the dramatic happenings of the day become the

curriculum of continuing education on line before the war, to reflect the then distance from the standard pattern of research, study, and instruction. Furthermore, continuing education of adults is subjected much less to the criticisms being made of formal education in general: that it is largely irrelevant and useless, or at best misleading, for our times.

This factor was discussed in a recent symposium of Canadian educators visiting Syracuse. The point was made that much of the criticism currently leveled against both public school and collegiate curricula could be alleviated by applying some of the concepts, format and methods used in informal continuing education programs: focus on a recognized and significant issue or problem, use of a wide mixture of resources and methods appropriate for the purpose and group, involvement of "students" in planning and conduct of learning experiences, emphasis on widespread participation, democratic procedures and congenial atmosphere, flexibility in timing and content to be covered, concern for practical and realistic outcomes or applications.

Not so many years ago, a newly appointed Chancellor of Syracuse University was making a tour of various installations and operations comprising his domain. After walking through the classrooms and offices of the Continuing Education Center for the Public Service and talking with its staff, he commented that probably some of the most exciting and worthwhile education within the University occurred at that Center. The Chancellor's remarks were somewhat broader and more academic in basis than an evaluation made a few years earlier by a newspaper reporter who had covered a number of Center programs and had dubbed the total operation "the social conscience" of the University.

At the same time, it is the social and educational needs of continuing education as described. The emphasis is on the individual, on the energy, innovation and sense of commitment of the educators whether applied to the needs and interests of business, governmental officials, social planners, poor people, minorities or any identifiable group of adults.

A rather typical recent example of this kind of program development involved the Commissioner of the Jamesville Penitentiary, the Undersheriff of Onondaga County, a professor of Social Work (formerly in Probation Work), and staff of the Continuing Education Center for the Public Service in planning a complex training program for correctional personnel at the Jamesville and County Jail institutions. Faculty members to teach in the program met with prison officials and toured the Penitentiary and Jail to achieve a better "feel" for the needs of program participants. To help guards and other personnel meet the changes and challenges of modern correctional work, new program ideas and methods will be developed and used in this training.

This same approach--concern for real and direct social problems, involvement of clientele and faculty, use of participatory training methods, flexibility in terms of time and place of training, and relevance of programming to the needs and interests of the group--these factors characterize program development at the Continuing Education Center for a great variety of groups, agencies, companies, associations. They make real and effective the "social conscience" dedication of continuing education at Syracuse University.

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